



FRONT MISSION

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by [By Angelo D. Pineda](#), [Kyle A. Thompson](#), and [Wilson K. Tam](#) - updated March 26, 2011

Front Mission is Square's first true turn-based strategy role-playing game (RPG) series, and is currently handled by Square Enix Product Development Division 6 (PDD6). Created in 1993 by series visionary, Toshiro Tsuchida (the current head of PDD6), the series made its debut on the Super Famicom in 1995 with *Front Mission*. Ever since then, the series has enjoyed the release of many other titles as well as a large stock of merchandise in Japan. While not as popular as Square's other flagships like *Final Fantasy*, the series has earned a very loyal audience that supports it unquestionably. This success however has not transferred overseas and it is partially due to Square USA's poor handling of the series. Only four installments have seen release in the West: *Front Mission 1st*, 3, 4 and *Evolved*. As a result, many outside of Japan will never be able to truly appreciate the series in its entirety.

Inspired by Intelligent Designs' *Fire Emblem* series, *Front Mission* plays out in turn-based strategy, though several spin-offs have been created throughout its 15 year history. What makes it different, however, is its usage of mecha (called "wanderpanzer" or "wanzer," German for "walking tank") and how it affects game mechanics. Wanzers are modeled after the "real robot" mecha archetype, being a versatile war machine that is used alongside other military weapons. One of the biggest draws is the customization aspect. The player is able to customize a wanzer from its parts, auxiliary backpacks, weapons, and even paint schemes. The incredible amount of customization can be addictive, but also daunting to those who are not into micromanaging their games. It's very comparable to From Software's *Armored Core* series in this sense so those who have played those games will feel right at home with *Front Mission*.

In battle, the uniqueness of the wanzer is also displayed; a wanzer's performance is dictated by its four parts: a body, two arms, and the legs. Destroyed parts reduce a wanzer's ability to fight; blow off its legs and it can't move or evade attacks. A lost arm means that it can't use any weapons it has equipped. Take out the body and the wanzer is destroyed. Combat is similar to other genre offerings in that it takes place on isometric 2D (in *Front Mission*) or 3D grid maps. When a battle initiates, the action zooms into a close-up of the map that shows the wanzers fighting. While battles were modeled initially after *Fire Emblem*, it has evolved dramatically since the first game. Action Points (AP) were introduced and dictate how many actions a unit can do on their turn. Melee, ranged, and artillery weapons that acted in a rock-paper-scissors manner became true melee, ranged, and artillery weapons with their own unique qualities. Eventually, squad-based combat and friendly fire made its way into the series, giving it a tremendous amount of strategic depth and variety.

Game mechanics aside, *Front Mission*'s true strength comes from its design and story elements. The biggest design influence is the series' grounded realism; the setting is based off of near-future trends of how our world will evolve. For example, the technology of the series has real-life applications. *Front Mission*'s cast of characters come from all over the world, from Venezuela to Korea to even Iceland. In terms of game design, each game differs in how it's meant to be played and these result from the atmosphere and story direction. For example, the player is thrown into all-out wars in *Front Mission 2* as it takes place during a coup d'etat. Its art and music direction are gritty and depressing, fitting for the game's storyline. A notable trend in terms of art and music is that artists and composers differ amongst the games. Artists and composers of the series include Yoshitaka Amano, Yusuke Naora, Yoko Shimomura, and Hidenori Iwasaki. Despite the lack of a true representative in art and music (Naora and Iwasaki could be considered such for art and music, respectively), all elements in each game come together to form a greater cohesive whole.

In terms of story, *Front Mission* is modeled after serial dramas, much like the TV serials *24* and *Lost*. While each game has a self-contained story, they also interconnect with the other entries. Newcomers can jump into any game due to the self-contained story, but will miss out on the bigger picture. The interconnected stories also exist to provide a cause-and-effect relationship for major events; what happened in one *Front Mission* affects events from another. Accompanying these events is a large recurring cast of characters, adding considerable depth to the stories. While the video games' storytelling focus is more world-driven, the expanded universe supplements' (detailed further in the article) character-driven focus balances this out. So like any serial drama, only those who stick with *Front Mission* from the start will get the most out of its storyline.

The stories of the series revolve around supranational unions and the conflicts between them in the 21st



Front Mission (Super Famicom)



Front Mission 2 (PlayStation)



Front Mission 3 (PlayStation)

and 22nd century. Most involve the Oceania Cooperative Union (OCU) and the United States of the New Continent (USN/Unified Continental States or UCS in the official English localizations), though other unions such as the European Community (EC), Organization of African Consolidation (OAC), and the Republic of Zaftra take part as well. In keeping with the series' near-future roots, each game focuses on particular military, political, scientific, and philosophical themes that form the core of their stories. For example, a major recurring theme in the games is the struggle between globalization and nationalism.



Front Mission 5 (PlayStation 2)

Front Mission (フロントミッション) / Front Mission 1st (フロントミッション ザ・ファースト) - Super Famicom, WonderSwan Color, PlayStation, NDS, PlayStation 3 PSN, PlayStation Portable PSN (1995)



PlayStation Cover



American NDS Cover



Japanese NDS Cover




Super Famicom Cover

Developed by G-Craft (*Arc the Lad*), the company Tsuchida and his colleagues founded after leaving NCS/Masaya (*Assault Suits Valken*, aka *Cybernator* in Konami's English release), the original *Front Mission* was published by Square for the Nintendo Super Famicom in 1995.

In 2090, an OCU recon unit is sent to investigate a USN munitions factory on an island called Huffman Island. The investigation spirals out of control when the unit is ambushed by USN forces, which destroy the factory. This incident, later known as the Larcus Incident, results in the outbreak of the 2nd Huffman Conflict when diplomatic talks between the OCU and USN fail.

Quick Info:	
Developer:	G-Craft
Publisher:	SquareSoft
Director:	Hideo Iwasaki
Genre:	Strategy
Themes:	Mechas! Military

OCU Characters



Roid Clive

The main male protagonist, Roid is an OCU captain who gets involved in the Larcus Incident. His fiancée, Karen Meure, is killed during the Larcus Incident. He joins the Canyon Crows mercenary group upon meeting OCU colonel Guri B. Olson, who promises him the chance to find the pilot who killed Karen. Called Royd Clive in the official English localization, Lloyd Clive in the unofficial one.



Ryuji Sakata

An OCU soldier and friend of Roid's, Ryuji was also involved in the Larcus Incident. He tried to return to Japan after being dismissed from the army, but couldn't do it out of shame. Ryuji is the son of Reiji Sakata, who is the head of Sakata Industries, a conglomerate that produces medical and wanzer technologies.



Natalie Blakewood

The main female protagonist, Natalie is an OCU lieutenant and the adjutant for the Canyon Crows. She is the daughter of Willas E. Blakewood, a brigadier general who also oversees the Canyon Crows. Her father Willas objects to her involvement with the Canyon Crows and military life in general.



Driscoll




Front Mission (Super Famicom)



Bandai's Wonderswan in 2002. This is a complete port with no additions or changes made to the game. It actually looks pretty good, even though the viewable screen area is much smaller, and the background turns entirely black when you try to move. The music has been obviously downgraded a bit too, but still sounds pretty decent.


In 2003, a port of the original *Front Mission* was made for the Sony PlayStation, titled *Front Mission 1st*, as part of the new Front Mission Project line. The defining feature of this remake is the inclusion of a second scenario for the USN side. This new scenario explored unresolved plot elements from the OCU scenario and thereby explaining what really happened during the 2nd Huffman Conflict. The new scenario was also used to bridge the gap between *Front Mission* and *Front Mission 4*, the latter of which is a continuation of on-going stories from the former.

USN Characters



Kevin Greenfield

The main male protagonist of the USN story, found only in the PSOne and DS games, Kevin is a USN lieutenant and a member of the Black Hounds assault unit. He was the leader of the Bravo team with the Black Hounds, but was relieved of his duties after botching up an operation in the Andes Mountains.



Maria Paredes

The main female protagonist, Maria is a USN captain and a member of the Black Hounds. She was the leader of the Alpha team with the Black Hounds and possesses exceptional combat abilities. Maria's past, even her military history, is largely unknown and she rarely brings it up in conversations.

Despite the addition of a new scenario, *Front Mission 1st* is largely the same as the original game. Yoshitaka Amano returns to supply new artwork for the USN scenario, but Yusuke Naora (Unlimited SaGa) makes his debut with the USN scenario. In contrast to Amano's fantasy-based style, Naora's realistic artwork is a stronger fit for the scenario and the game as a whole. The backgrounds are also redrawn and look more visually detailed than the original. Hidenori Iwasaki also makes his debut as the composer for *Front Mission 1st*. Iwasaki's work here involved arrangements of the original tracks, as well as new compositions for the USN scenario. The arrangements are a welcome change; most of the original tracks sound a lot better than before.

Art and music aside, the USN scenario takes its inspiration from the games that came after the original *Front Mission*. The end result is a better, balanced and engaging campaign. Story and character development are major improvements from the OCU scenario; it's well written, the pacing is good, and most importantly, it has character development. Whereas only Roid and a few others had character development in the OCU scenario, everyone on the USN side gets a fair share of treatment. Game balance is also better, with less abrupt difficulty spikes than the OCU scenario. There are new parts and weapons, such as repair backpacks, but these are minor additions. This PlayStation version of *Front Mission* has neither received an official nor an unofficial English localization.

Using leftover funding from the Front Mission Project, *Front Mission 1st* was ported to the Nintendo DS in 2007. Aside from touch screen functionality, the game is largely the same as its Playstation 1 counterpart. This version does, however, have a number of additions that make it the definitive version of the original *Front Mission*. The most notable of these additions are new missions on both scenarios, and retroactively-added recurring characters from other episodes to better tie-in the series' on-going stories. Other additions include new parts, weapons, and difficulty settings. The touch screen controls are passable, but the small menu options make it hard to use at times. This version was released in both Japan and North America, making it the only version of *Front Mission 1st* to receive an official English localization.



Front Mission (Super Famicom)



Front Mission (PlayStation)



Front Mission (PlayStation)

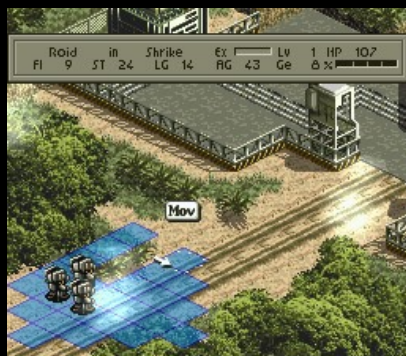


Front Mission (PlayStation)

Comparison Screenshots



Super Famicom







PlayStation



NDS



WonderSwan Color

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Front Mission: Gun Hazard (フロントミッションシリーズ ガンハザード) - Super Famicom (1996)



Cover

Quick Info:
Developer: Omiya Soft
Publisher: [SquareSoft](#)
Director: Hideo Suzuki
Genre: [Action: Side-Scrolling](#)
Themes: [Mechas!](#)
[Military](#)



Front Mission: Gun Hazard (Super Famicom)

Months after the release of the original *Front Mission*, a new entry developed by Omiya Soft was made available to the public. *Front Mission: Gun Hazard* is a side-scrolling shooter spin-off that was released in 1996 for the Super Famicom. Set in 2064, it takes place during a time of violent revolutions and revolves around an orbital elevator known as "Atlas." Despite what some would think, *Front Mission: Gun Hazard* is actually not a canon entry in the series timeline.

Characters



Albert Grabner

The main protagonist, Albert is a sergeant for the Bergen Army. He takes part in the effort to suppress a violent revolution in the country led by a Bergen Army colonel.



Ark Hellbrand

A Colonel for the Bergen Army, Ark is the de facto leader of a coup d'etat in the country. His goal is to take over Bergen and assassinate President Orwen.



Brenda Lockhart

Brenda is a mercenary who works for the coup d'etat forces in Bergen. She is assigned to find and capture the president of the country.



Front Mission: Gun Hazard (Super Famicom)



Front Mission: Gun Hazard (Super Famicom)



Front Mission: Gun Hazard (Super Famicom)



Front Mission: Gun Hazard (Super Famicom)

Front Mission: Gun Hazard's presentation takes inspiration from *Assault Suits Valken* in its futuristic design and setting. Yoshitaka Amano returns to provide art direction and as with the original *Front Mission*, players can spot similarities between this game's characters and ones from the earlier *Final Fantasy* games. Amano aside, the rest of the visual presentation is good. Detailed backgrounds give a good sense of scale, the wanzers animations are nice, and the special effects keep the battles from being boring. The aural side of things is the star of the show, featuring a team effort from composers such as Nobuo Uematsu (*Final Fantasy*), Yasunori Mitsuda (*Chrono*), Masashi Hamauzu (*SaGa*), and Junya Nakano (*Threads of Fate*). The musical score while lacking real standout pieces, is powerful, engaging, and is very consistent quality-wise. The sound effects aren't nearly as good, but they get the job done.

As a side-scrolling shooter, *Front Mission: Gun Hazard* plays out like *Assault Suits Valken*. The comparison is fair as Toshiro Tsuchida and his colleagues created that game. Players control the action in real-time through their wanzers, which can do a lot of actions from jumping to shooting. On-foot action is also an option for players daring to fight outside their wanzers. *Front Mission: Gun Hazard* progresses through the use of a world map, in which the player travels from location to location. Missions can also be done with an ally unit controlled by the AI if the player needs help. By defeating enemy units, the player gains experience points and money. The experience points are used to strengthen the wanzers, whereas the money is used to buy new parts and weapons. Although not as in-depth as the original *Front Mission*, the customization aspect is a huge part of this game.

Although it's inspired by *Assault Suits Valken*, *Front Mission: Gun Hazard* doesn't quite play as smoothly. Whether it was intentional or not, the wanzers move rather slowly. It walks and jumps slowly and unless you use its boosters, don't expect the game to play out in a fast-paced manner as the game it's inspired by. The level design is also rather lackluster even though there are a lot of them to go through. It's fun to customize the wanzers and play around with them for sure. However, with the lack of any mini-games or other game modes, *Front Mission: Gun Hazard* focuses strictly on the missions. The story is interesting enough that the game is worth a shot, but replay value suffers due to the lack of things to do outside of missions.

Front Mission: Gun Hazard was released in Japan only. Fortunately, a group of series fans worked on an unofficial English localization and finished in 2004. Thus, the game can be played in the English language.



Front Mission: Gun Hazard (Super Famicom)



Front Mission: Gun Hazard (Super Famicom)



Front Mission: Gun Hazard (Super Famicom)



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